Christianity and the future of Christian democracy. Salting politics with compassion

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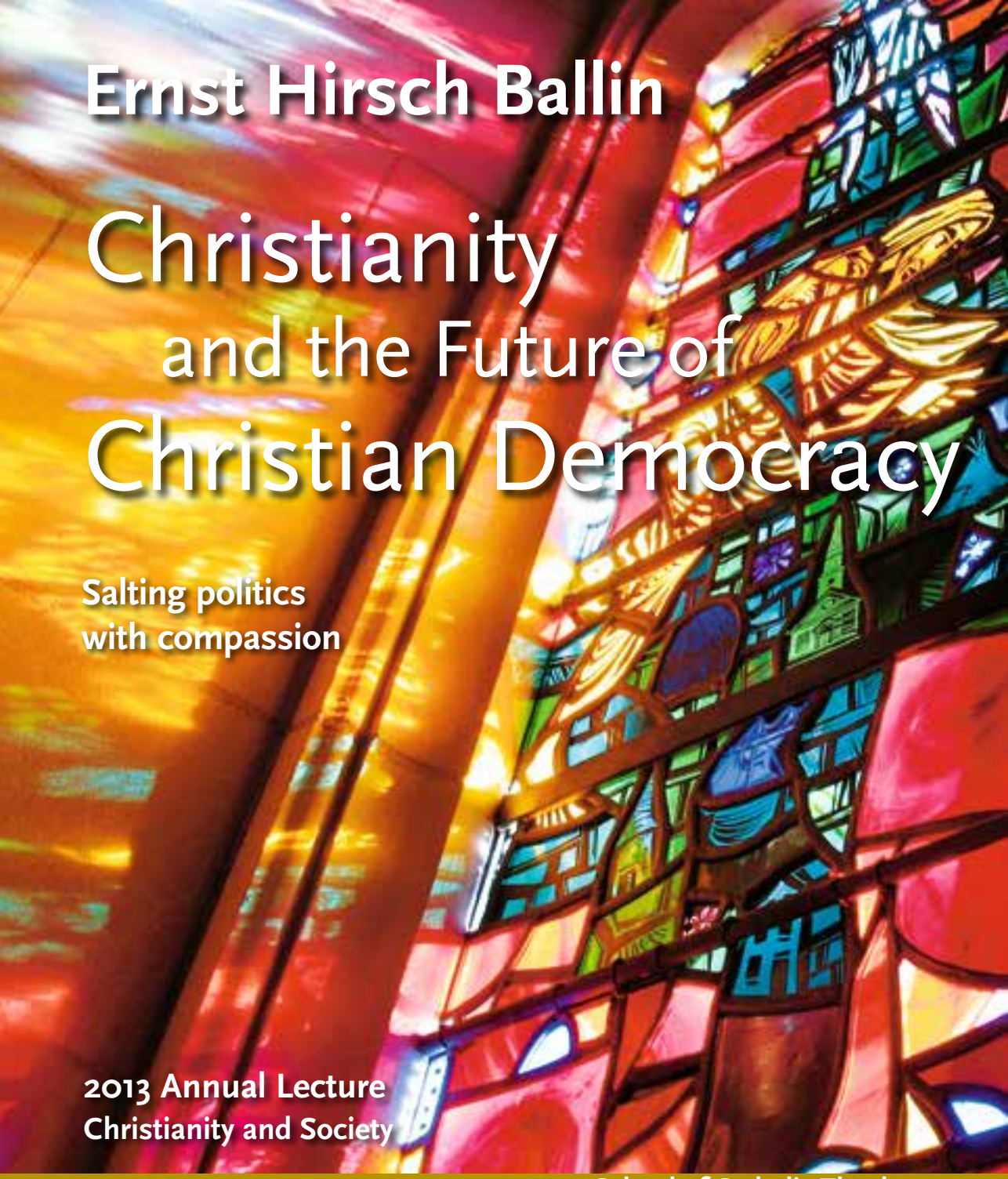

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Christianity and the Future of Christian Democracy

Salting politics with compassion

2013 Annual Lecture
Christianity and Society

School of Catholic Theology

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Understanding Society

Christianity and the Future of Christian Democracy

Salting politics with compassion

3rd Annual "Christianity and Society" Lecture by Ernst Hirsch Ballin on February 21, 2013 at Tilburg University

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Summary

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?

(Matthew 5:13)

The churches cannot pretend to be the historical origin of the political movements that assumed the name of Christian Democracy. The emergence of democratic principles and freedom of religion in the churches simply came too late to allow us to believe that democracy and human rights are congenital with Christian belief. Christian Democracy is rather the product of the confrontation with an emerging ethical orientation in the Catholic and Protestant churches since the late 19th century. At the beginning of the 21st century, both the churches and several Western European Christian Democratic parties have lost many of their former self-evident strengths and much of their authority. Neither the churches, nor these political parties should claim any privileged access to knowledge about the right decisions, but there are significant and potentially productive areas of common ground between the social teaching of the churches and Christian Democratic politics.

Introduction

It is quite a challenge to speak about the relationship between two movements which, each on their own account, are facing a rapid decline in membership and support in Western Europe and which are showing other signs of crisis. But I am not about to give a premature eulogy. On the contrary, more than any other quality, hope – giving hope and tirelessly working to realize dreams of peace and justice – should be the hallmark of any politics deserving of the name "Christian Democratic". The outlook that I will present in this lecture, while rooted in the history of Christian Democratic politics, is oriented towards the politics of our times in this part of the world. My own experience is in Dutch and European politics: I am a Christian Democrat, though I am no longer active in politics. My lecture will primarily take a scholarly approach to the subject. Nevertheless, it may have some practical implications for the role that Christian Democratic political values might play in Western European politics. Since the 19th century, the developments in Christian Democratic movements in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria and Italy have tended to follow similar patterns, although the effects of Nazism and fascism have obviously been different in the countries where these movements originated as opposed to the countries that were occupied by Nazi or fascist forces.

The subject of my lecture is also complicated by its breadth. It could be the subject matter of a whole book or even a series of publications[1]. When I discuss the role of the churches, I will concentrate on that of the Catholic Church, partly due to my own background and that of this School of Theology, and partly because it forms the principal religious background of Christian Democracy outside of the Netherlands. Much of what I have to say will nevertheless also apply to the relationship with Calvinist and Lutheran churches in the Netherlands and Germany. I hope to make my lecture as accessible as possible by presenting it in six brief chapters.

1 A recent valuable Dutch book on the same subject was recently published as a volume of the quarterly "Christen Democratische Verkenningen". See E. Borgman, P.J. Dijkman & P. van Geest (eds.), *Dood of wederopstanding? Over het christelijke in de Nederlandse politiek*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom 2012. Several contributions to this volume appear to present concurrent lines of argumentation, but came too late to be discussed in this lecture.

I Personalism and democratic citizenship

The subject of my lecture is not the relationship between church (or faith) and state in general. It is, in my view, important to stress that Christian Democrats reject the idea of a Christian state, whatever that might be. Christian Democracy is a view of *democratic* politics and presupposes democracy. This necessarily implies a secular state, at least as to its constitutional characteristics, for the simple reason that any other constitutional arrangement would violate the principle of the democratic equality of all citizens. *Citizenship* is the core concept of a democracy. However, the secular character of the state does not necessarily require the rigorous French arrangements of *sécularité*. Even Britain with its illustrious Anglican state church has long since assumed the substantive characteristics of a secular state: the appointment of bishops by royal decree does not give the monarch any real influence on the life of the church, nor do the bishops play anything other than a ceremonial role in state affairs.

In its program of party principles ("Program van uitgangspunten", PvU), the Dutch Christian Democratic party CDA expresses its relationship to the Gospel and the churches as a *dialogue* ("dialoog"), resulting in a political conviction ("politieke overtuiging"). The

program uses various expressions, such as "respond to" ("zich laten aanspreken"), "interaction" ("wisselwerking") and "search for meaning" ("zoeken naar betekenis"), none of which suggests submission. Members are required to accept the biblical foundation as a common standard for self-criticism, but they are not supposed to make a religious confession, nor to follow the instructions of ecclesiastical authorities. What they do have to "accept" and endorse is the political conviction that results from such a dialogue. A believer who thinks that specific, unequivocal political conclusions can be drawn from holy scriptures or the teachings of the church will regard this view as an inconsistent compromise. But in fact, it is the consequence of the uncompromising acceptance of democracy. Religious authorities may inspire, influence and criticize politicians, but under a democratic constitution, they cannot pretend to have the last word, nor can they accept a situation in which others would make them the sovereign power.

Since its foundation in 1980, the Dutch Christian Democratic party has always welcomed people with different religious convictions – or indeed people without a specific religious conviction – as active members and candidates for public office, including Muslim, Jewish and Hindu believers. The only requirement is that members endorse the political conviction described in the party's program of principles. However, one important question remains unanswered: what role can these fellow-members play in a serious dialogue with what the Gospel and the churches have to say as requested in the program?

Since no religious conversion is required or even suggested, it is first necessary to discuss how this concept of "dialogue" works. Moments of silence, prayer or singing can offer a reminder, but cannot serve as a dialogue in this sense. Sometimes short sections or striking quotations from the Bible are read out, which appear to convey a message about political action, but given the contextual richness of the Bible, such direct references can seldom offer a decisive argument in political controversies. Quotes from the Bible can even be abused to deliver a verbal blow to an opponent. The plundering of holy texts does not provide proof of being a believer.

Some members of the Christian Democratic party, especially those who adhere to traditional interpretations of their faith, turn to church leaders for advice. Apart from the fact that church leaders are usually keen to avoid any suggestion of giving instructions to politicians, listening to and heeding the word of ecclesiastical authorities is definitely not the same as a dialogue. A serious dialogue concerning the meaning of *religious* convictions for the development of *political* convictions should take into account the constitutional context of a democracy, including the principle of equality and the principle of equal respect for every human being and his or her identity, be it religious, cultural, ethnic or sexual. This is exactly what characterizes a political movement as Christian *Democratic;* without this principle, a political party might call itself "Christian", but would not qualify as truly democratic.

This needs further clarification. As I have just stated, a serious dialogue concerning the meaning of *religious* convictions for the development of *political* convictions should take into account the constitutional context of a democracy. This will not direct us to a specific view on economic policy or administrative organization, but it will lead us to a perspective on *mankind,* a perspective on men and women and their place in society. Putting the Christian view of mankind at the center of the Christian Democratic identity is commensurate with the anthropocentric turn brought about by Christianity[2]. The philosophical and societal relevance of this anthropocentric turn can be traced back to the origins of Christianity and Christ's life and teachings: the Good Samaritan and the Sermon on the Mount spring readily to mind, but as part of a deeper understanding we might also look to Abraham's sacrifice, which signifies the rejection of inhuman religious practices. All these stories are about *compassion* – the virtue that connects the faithful individual unconditionally with other human beings in *their* personal needs and sufferings. At the center of all these sacred texts is God the Compassionate, as Jewish, Christian and Muslim believers will confirm.

The anthropocentric turn did not come all at once. It was the fruit of centuries of reflection and dialogue from the Middle Ages[3] to the Enlightenment[4]. Confrontation with the injustices of the Modern Era provided a sharper focus on the notion of human dignity[5] and eventually produced the understanding that men and women are beings whose consciousness and

2 Johannes Baptist Metz, *Christliche Anthropozentrik. Über die Denkform des Thomas von Aquin.* München: Kösel-Verlag 1962.

3 Finnis writes about the movement towards human rights in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: "Every member of the human species is entitled to justice." We "have [human] rights (...) because every individual member of the species has the dignity of being a person". See John Finnis, *Aquinas. Moral, Political, and Legal Theory.* Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press 1998, p. 176.

4 Until then, "virtually all churches explicitly sanctioned *ancien régime's* basic institutions on a daily basis". Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790.* Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press 2011.

5 Human dignity is the core concept both in the Preamble and Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949) and in the Preamble and Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000). In German constitutional theory, human dignity was embraced as the core of the idea of the *Rechtsstaat.* Cf. Werner Maihofer, *Rechtsstaat und menschliche Würde.* Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1968.

morality are essentially related to the other as an individual equally deserving of respect. The preferred expression for this view of mankind is the notion of the "person". Before and – much more influentially – after the dehumanizing tragedy of the Holocaust and the World Wars, thinkers like Jacques Maritain brought forward the concept of the human person as the point of reference of legal philosophy and ethics[6]. Maritain's personalism was preceded (but apparently not directly influenced[7]) by that of Max Scheler in his value ethics (*Werte-Ethik*). Scheler, who died in 1928, was one of the few prominent German thinkers who had warned against National Socialism and Leninism. Later, Karol Wojtyła would go on to develop his Christian humanism, based largely on Scheler's ideas[8].

Church institutions have – finally – embraced the "personalist principle" and "an integral and solidary humanism", based on respect for human dignity. The person is the individual opening up to the other. The concept of person therefore entails solidarity. I quote these words from the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,* published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace[9], but similar approaches can be found throughout modern Christianity. Yet nobody should be allowed to shy away from the humble acknowledgement that people acting on behalf of the churches have often trampled on these principles themselves.

We may therefore say that personalism is the core of Christian social theory. The *person* is the notion that characterizes the dialogue between faith and politics aspired to by Christian Democratic parties. However, this anthropological insight is not exclusively linked to the Christian confession, whether in theory or in practice. Historically, Christianity's anthropocentric turn was rather the fruit of an intellectual encounter with the works of Greek and Muslim philosophers, the loosening of constraints after the Reformation and Revolutions, and the subsequent ethical awakening that followed dramatic evils and crimes against humanity. Thinkers such as Max Scheler, Jacques Maritain, Karl Rahner and – in a Jewish intellectual tradition – Emmanuel Lévinas laid the intellectual foundation for practical engagement by others, including some true political leaders in the half century of renewal in state and society that followed the disasters wrought by totalitarianism.

There is no reason – no theological or philosophical justification – to claim that being a Christian is the best or even the only way to arrive at this humanistic view of man and society. But there are compelling reasons to say that being a Christian requires mutual respect and compassion with regard to every other human being, irrespective of faith, race or gender. This is the only justification for the Christian character of democratic political parties, but these notions are not exclusively Christian possessions. A Christian Democrat will, as a citizen, devote his or her activities to human dignity and solidarity.

The political identity of a Christian Democratic political party could be summarized as *bringing together the notions of personalism and democratic citizenship.* Based on this recognition, the openness of political organizations to people with different beliefs should not be viewed as a concession but as a necessity. The real question for Christian Democratic parties under the present-day conditions of religiously diverse societies is therefore not whether they can embrace non-Christian members who share their personalistic views – the answer to that question can only be in the affirmative – but whether or not they should facilitate their joint engagement by doing away with Christian symbols such as the Christian name of their party and certain rituals at their meetings. Political parties with a Christian Democratic character have answered this question in different ways under different conditions.

Personally, I would not oppose such changes under all circumstances. Political parties have to define and redefine their presentation and procedures under changing conditions. That said, I would not recommend such a change under the present conditions. I see a serious risk that, once the symbolic anchors have been lifted, a political party might drift even more easily in directions that are inconsistent with the principles of its political identity. Given the conditions of media-centric 21st century politics, political parties are certainly not tempted to over-stress their principles, but rather to succumb to the temptations of antagonism and of favoring special interest groups with financial resources. Recent political history in Western Europe should make us aware of such risks. The undeniable fact that it is not *necessary* to recognize a Christian foundation ("grondslag") – in an unassuming dialogical sense – does not mean that it is *irrelevant*. The issue of whether or not members and voters will understand what the name of a Christian Democratic party signifies, depends on its members and its leadership, their reliability and their practices, and especially their readiness to engage in a dialogue about values and principles.

6 Jacques Maritian, *The Man and the State*. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press 1951, p.149.

7 John F. Crosby, *Personalist Papers*. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press 2004, p. 170.

8 Cf. Karol Wojtyła / Johannes Paul II, *Primat des Geistes. Philosophische Schriften*, Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag 1984. Cf. my editorial "Een nieuw humanisme", in: *Christen Democratische Verkenningen* 2001, nr. 1, pp. 22-23.

9 English edition Washington DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana / United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2005.

II The Christian state and its demise

Until recently and to some extent into the present, Western European states have identified themselves with a supposedly common Christian belief, and some of them still have a sort of "state church". That view has turned out to be incompatible with democracy and the equal treatment of all citizens. Within this democratic constitutional framework, it is possible to practice Christian Democratic politics but striving for a "Christian state" would be contradictory and an attempt to breathe new life into a relic from the past. At a time when pagan rulers identified themselves with founding myths that united their tribe or nation, the conversion of these rulers to Christianity amounted to a so-called "conversion" of the tribe or nation as a whole. That is what happened during the early dissemination of the Christian faith and it was later repeated with Islam. As late as the 16th century, "peace" between Protestants and Catholics in Europe was achieved with the acceptance of the rule "*cuis regio eius religio*" ("whose realm, his religion", the guiding principle of the Peace of Augsburg, concluded in 1555). They did not yet recognize that freedom is essential for being a true believer; conversions under threat and pressure, as had been extorted by the Inquisition, were not acts of faith and dramatically discredited the Roman Catholic Church.

In our assessment of the future of Christian Democracy, it is essential to be clear about the relationship between faith and state. At present, it is an almost unanimous belief in Western Europe that the "separation of church and state" is one of the distinguishing achievements of Western civilization. This requirement goes beyond the abstention from exerting direct pressure on someone's convictions: it entails an even-handed attitude towards all citizens. To accept this as a decision of principle – not a concession – is necessary for the credibility of Christian Democratic politics. As recently as a quarter of a century ago, when I had my first experience in politics, I encountered fellow party members who criticized my report on spiritual care in government-funded institutions because they were unhappy with my recommendation that Christianity and other denominations should be treated equally. When I worked with my fellow politicians to shape the government's policy on euthanasia, I met with criticism from two sides: from conservative Catholics who thought that a Catholic member of government should simply translate the teachings of the church into binding law for everyone, and from others who suspected me of attempting to impose the demands of my own religion on society as a whole. In fact, our cautious approach to the subject was not due to religious reservations but was based on rational arguments that I was well able to share with my non-religious colleagues[10].

Many see the separation of church and state as the only effective guarantee of freedom and also as an advantage over Islam and Muslim countries. Yet Islamic scholars who value inner freedom as a hallmark of faith have – basically for the same reasons – adopted a clear preference for the secular state. According to Abdullahi Ahmed An Na'im[11] Shari'a is a religious interpretation of what Muslims ought to do; the State is territorial, not Islamic, "legislation must always be based on civic reason"[12].

Christianity will only be able to relate to present-day politics (politics that fosters interfaith understanding), if it does not pretend to be society's *unique* ethical guide. "Evangelical humanism" – i.e. an ethical understanding of faith and interfaith relations, as recommended by Joseph Moingt SJ[13] – will allow for such a position. Father Moingt underlines the necessity of doing so in the light of contemporary developments such as worldwide urbanization.

10 A striking similar view has been expressed by An Na'im in his book, quoted hereafter (p. 37)

11 Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State. Negotiating the Future of Shari'a*. Cambridge MA / London: Harvard University Press 2008. Cf. also Ali Mezghani, *L'État inachevé. La question du droit dans les pays arabes.* Paris: Éditions Gallimard 2011.

12 *O.c.*, p. 29.

13 "Het evangelisch humanisme". In: *Benedictijns tijdschrift,* Vol. 73, No. 1 (March 2012), pp. 12-30.

My conclusion is the following. Christian democratic parties are not "confessional" political movements. In a plural democracy, no proposal should be advanced with religious "arguments": that would contradict the constitutional principle that a law, albeit the result of a majority decision, should be the result of deliberation equally open to anyone. In Seyla Benhabib's definition the principle of democracy means that "the people are not only the object but also the authors of the law to which they are subject"[14]. Respect for the dignity of each human being also requires respect for a person's convictions, as well as his or her inner motivation. These convictions may be shared with others in a religious community, but they should never be imposed on others. The problem facing Christian democracy in our times is not that the contemporary pluralistic state does not leave room for such convictions, but rather that all too often politicians do not understand how to relate to them in a manner that is acceptable to others. Instead, such convictions are traded for a chance to ride the swell of popular sentiment.

How can Christian Democratic politics safeguard its credibility? It will not do so by abandoning its faithful points of reference: "if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" Nor will it do so by clinging to a self-aggrandizing claim to moral superiority. There needs to be a modest acceptance that politicians with standards that go beyond the latest opinion polls have to do better than they have done so far. Under these conditions, democratic politicians might rediscover how being a believer can shed light on the problems of our times and how the common ground with Christianity can stimulate them in their political efforts.

14 See Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006, pp. 47-48.

III The emergence of Christian social ethics and Christian Democratic politics

One of the toughest prejudices Christian politicians encounter is the view that "they" (i.e. their predecessors) were on the wrong side of history when mankind freed itself from feudalism, colonialism and discrimination against women and homosexuals. It is true that the institutions of the churches have all too often accepted improper "protection" by kings and dictators who pretended to be *defensores fidei*. Even in the recent history of some countries, missionary activities rode on the back of colonial submission. The anti-ecclesiastical radicalization of the French Revolution provoked an inappropriate rejection of the Revolution as such. Enlightenment and the "Revolution of the Human Rights" were, however, deeply rooted in the core message of Christianity that every human being has an intrinsic, inalienable value that makes him or her a child of God. The Constantinian identification of the Roman Empire with Christianity was followed by centuries of competition between the principal centers of power, especially the Pope and the Emperor. Intellectuals who took part in this struggle were mostly loyal advisors or servants of the rulers whose interests they defended[15]. Nevertheless, with the deepening

15 Cf. George Garnett, *Marsilius of Padua and 'the Truth of History"*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010.

of the theological and philosophical discourse after the rediscovery of Aristotle, there was no way back. Johannes Baptist Metz qualifies the thinking of Thomas Aquinas – in his day, convicted by his bishop for being an "Aristotelian" – as the origin of the "anthropocentric shift". The Reformation, the Religious Wars and the emergence of a plurality of competing powers – including England and the Republic – finally created space for freedom in the 16th century in which the "humanists"[16] (who were, in fact, independent Christian thinkers) could determine the course of modernity: Kant, Hegel and the recognition of human rights[17]. The idea that women were entitled to equal protection of their rights as citizens had yet to be recognized, even by the most enlightened and learned thinkers at the time of the French Revolution. Olympe de Gouges published a treatise in 1791 demanding a *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*; she was guillotined two years later[18].

During the era of the French Revolution and the "Springtime of the Peoples" (the 1848 European Revolutions), the church remained an ally of the conservative forces. This is echoed in Puccini's opera Tosca, set against the backdrop of Rome in 1800. A sea change came with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum of 1891, the first "social" encyclical letter. This event coincided with a like-minded Protestant initiative in the Netherlands: the Christian-Social Congress, convened for the first time in 1890 with the aim of dealing with the pressing social needs of the workers[19].

16 On this subject, see my Thomas More Lecture *Law, Justice, and the Individual* (Leiden / Boston: Brill 2011), pp 5-6: "in the first few decades of the sixteenth century the humanists More, Vives, and Erasmus became friends. They would meet together in England or in the Low Countries, and it was at the home of the Antwerp humanist and printer Peter Giles that Thomas More's most famous work, Utopia, was conceived. In that turbulent period, More, Vives, and Erasmus were at the inception of a Christian humanism characterized by religious tolerance and a rational approach to social issues. The poor relief policy advocated by Charles V is but one example of the practical significance of their ideas, and in 1516, in Leuven, Thomas More published his celebrated *Utopia*, in which he constructed a hypothetical world based on those ideas. However, the path adopted by these intellectuals was a hazardous one, precisely because religious tolerance was itself a utopia at that time and no match when confronted with the struggle of princes and sovereigns for political and ecclesiastical power. In 1524 Vives's father, also a humanist, was among those burnt at the stake in Spain having been accused of reverting to the Jewish faith of his forefathers."

17 On the subject of the following paragraphs, see also my Thomas More Lecture, p. 9.

18 See Christoph Menke & Francesca Raimondi (eds.), *Die Revolution der Menschenrechte. Grundlegende Texte zu einem neuen Begriff des Politischen*. Berlin: Suhrkamp 2011, pp. 54-57.

19 See for contemporary appraisal of the congress Jan-Willem van den Braak, Wim Eikelboom & Hans Groen, *Schepping & Samenleving. Een duurzame relatie.* DSoorn: Stichting Christelijk-Sociaal Congres 2011.

The beginnings of Christian Democratic parties at that time in several Western European countries were the product of the confrontation with an emerging ethical orientation in the Catholic and Protestant churches. Since the late 19th century the churches had lost their state-like functions or, in the case of Rome, its direct political role. The much broader democratic and emancipatory movements in the age of the Industrial Revolution had prevailed. As a result of the political wish of ecclesial leadership to include all their sheep, these parties had to amalgamate Social-Christian followers and the conservative Christian traditionalists who, alongside nationalists, played an important role throughout the 19th century as the main political adversary to the Liberals. However, the driving force in 19th century politics was the emerging ethical orientation. Accordingly, the Christian Democratic parties were not only an answer to the injustices that many people experienced and witnessed: they also bridged the gap between the Christian communities and the idea of democracy. In that sense they offered Christians who wanted to get rid of authoritarian constitutional structures an acceptable alternative to liberalism.

Rerum Novarum was the origin of the Catholic Church's teaching – its "social doctrine" – about solidarity, subsidiarity and the obligation of the state to protect the human dignity and living conditions of the workers. The social doctrine was conformed and extended in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, drafted by the leading Catholic social philosopher Oswald von Nell-Breuning SJ. The painful degree of indecision in the Church during the era of National Socialism and fascism – with heroes and saints on one side, collaborators on the other side and too many authorities in between – is well known. Ultimately, it was not until after this era that the Catholic Church allied itself unequivocally with the struggle for universal human rights.

The last decade of the 19th century therefore gave birth to Christian Democracy, and the aftermath of the Second World War marked its rebirth. This profound change within the churches in favor of the emancipation of ordinary people in Western European societies – many of whom identified themselves as Christians – is of immense importance. It freed them from the dilemma of whether to support conservative forces, who ignored their interests, or back deeply secularist, often anti-religious, liberal and socialist movements. Yet for a long time, both sides refused to entertain the possibility that the rift between liberal democracy and Christianity could be bridged. Social Democrats and Christian Democrats were long unable to forge government coalitions: in the Netherlands this impasse lasted until 1939 and in Germany's Weimar Republic a coalition came too late. Oswald von Nell-Breuning was among the small group of leading figures in the Catholic Church who took a clear stand against National Socialism. After the Second World War,

he became an advisor for Christian Democrats and Social Democrats alike who were seeking inspiration in Catholic social teaching. His uncompromising stand for mankind was summed up by his motto "Unbeugsam für den Menschen", "Uncompromising for men"[20].

20 Oswald von Nell-Breuning, *Unbeugsam für den Menschen. Lebensbild, Begegnungen, ausgewählte Texte*. Freiburg: Herder 1989.

IV At the center of the political system

After the Second World War, Christian Democratic politics had thus been freed from restorative tendencies and the parties positioned themselves at the center of *Wiederaufbau* and European solidarity. The belated acceptance of democracy, freedom of religion and human rights in the world view of the churches further reinforced Christian Democratic politics. Usually they were centrist, moderate "people's parties" (*Volksparteien, partidos populares*) which displayed quite a wide range of views and took a practical attitude to matters of policy. If they had repeated the tenets of Christianity in their biblical version, they would have condemned themselves to merely giving testimony of a moral viewpoint without having much of a practical impact, a role fulfilled in the Netherlands by the smaller Christian political parties. In the post-war Christian Democratic parties – in the Netherlands since the merger of separate protestant and catholic parties in 1980 – followers of various Christian denominations came together, and mostly also welcomed others who shared basic values with mainstream Christendom. Yet this inclusivity did not mean that the parties lacked a characteristic identity. At that time Western European politics was divided according to differences in socio-economic view on the one hand and according to religious differences (Christian

vs. secular) on the other hand[21]. Because of the priority of the cultural dimension in their political identity, Christian Democratic political parties mostly tried to reconcile both sides of the socio-economic spectrum.

The post-war development of Christian Democratic politics, with an increased emphasis on international responsibility, was consistent with new trends in the social doctrine of the churches. The papal encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, issued by Pope John XXIII in 1961, 70 years after *Rerum Novarum*, represented a new step towards the recognition of human rights in Catholic social thinking. I quote: "Men, too, are becoming more and more conscious of their rights as human beings, rights which are universal and inviolable; and they are aspiring to more just and more human relations with their fellows." From 1963 – the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* – the Church joined the struggle for human rights in developing countries, and during the pontificate of John Paul II human rights replaced natural law as the central political-ethical concept. Nevertheless, many believers still long for a clear and unambiguous endorsement of the right to equal treatment and conscientious self-determination of every human being, regardless of his or her sexual identity. Protestant theologians such as the Lutheran bishop Wolfgang Huber address the whole range of questions concerning faith, human dignity, politics and law.

I will have to say a few words about the apparent harmony between these views expressed on behalf of the churches and the post-war refoundation of constitutionalism and international relations. In his recent book, Hans Joas discussed whether human rights emanate from Judeo-Christian origins, as is sometimes claimed, or from the Enlightenment, which was essentially non-religious[22]. On the basis of his findings, he concludes that in reality there has been one, basically common movement of the "sacralization of the person" over recent centuries. Joas's findings do not discredit any more specific motives for an endorsement of human dignity but, in my view, his book should lead us away from parochialism in politics. The "ethos of human rights" ("Ethos der Menschenrechte")[23], solidarity with the downtrodden and a preference for democracy, when taken together, define the practical ethical and political values consistent with the concept of human dignity.

A parallel development concerned the attitude of the Church towards democracy. Yet ecclesiastical authorities have long appeared to be unduly cautious when forced to deal with undemocratic rulers, perhaps reinforced by an understanding that the democratic mindset and the principle of equality of the sexes should not be allowed to overturn the inner structure of the Church itself. Pope John Paul II was the first pontiff who clearly aligned himself with democratization movements, against the backdrop of the struggle in his home country, Poland. In 1991, in his encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus*, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, he wrote about the appreciation that must be shown for the democratic system "inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate"[24].

Obviously, within Western European and Northern American churches, the recognition of democratic values had taken place much earlier. The Pope's last step *ex cathedra* was nevertheless historically important. It corresponds effectively with a view of the relationship between holy scriptures and teaching of the churches as a *dialogue* and it has had a twofold effect on the gradual reconciliation between the teachings of the churches and secular democracy. On the one hand, it has further encouraged Catholics to view themselves as protagonists in relation to democracy and the rule of law, and on the other hand, it provided the starting point for a renewed substantive involvement of the Church in a number of controversial issues related to sexuality, human life and giving priority to the poor.

Christian politicians have to be able to follow their conscience in their duty to act as democratically legitimized participants in the political process without jeopardizing their personal integrity as a Christian. With respect to this, the authoritative *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* recommends a "method of discernment", "structured around certain key elements" including analysis "with the help of social sciences", reflection "in the light of the Gospel and the Church's social teaching", and "identification of choices"[25]. The required "discernment" can, however, be a subject of controversy among Catholics, sometimes spurred on by the demands expressed in the *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*[26]. According to the *Compendium*, quoting the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council's Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*,

21 Cf. Hanspeter Kriesi, Edgar Grande et al., *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press 2008, Kindle-edition, Ch. I.

22 Hans Joas, *Die Sakralität der Person. Eine neue Genealogie der Menschenrechte.* Berlin: Suhrkamp 2011.

23 Franz Böckle, *Ja zum Menschen. Bausteine einer Konkreten Moral.* München: Kösel, 1995, p. 102.

24 Para. 850. Cf. the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Libreria Editrice Vaticana / United States Conference of Bishops, Washington D 2005), para 567.

25 *Compendium* para. 568.

26 2002, Cf. *Compendium* para. 565-574.

the politician's "personal decision" should take place in a context of dialogue. Believers "should try to guide each other by sincere dialogue in a spirit of mutual charity and with anxious interest above all in the common good". I will return to the question of how this method of discernment might be made to take account of today's profoundly pluralistic and democratic society.

After the "cultural revolution" of the 1960s, new structuring conflicts have, according to Kriesi et al., replaced the older cleavages, including "new social movements which mobilized in the name of universalist values – human rights, emancipation of women, solidarity with the poor of the world, protection of the environment". These themes clearly appealed to compassionate believers, although many Christian Democratic parties primarily identified with traditional cultural values and institutions (family, a strong army)[27]. Conservative clerics would not object, but traditionalism falls short when it comes to putting a human rights ethos into practice. Meanwhile, many Western European Christian Democratic parties have condemned themselves to a permanent balancing act. Observers have often identified two strands of political thinking: one as the left wing (e.g. the *Sozialausschüsse* in the German CDU), the other called the right wing (often connected to business associations), while the party leadership was usually able to find some middle ground. Thanks to their common rejection of revolution and exclusively state-controlled solidarity schemes, Christian Democratic parties produced more or less coherent political programs and were able to take up a position at the political center of Western European democracies, balancing the socio-economic "left" and "right". This did not necessarily mean that they were deprived of a distinct Christian Democratic political identity. The Christian Democratic parties in several European countries made big efforts to include the whole range of cultural values in the same party, emphasizing their preference that state policy should enable everyone to bear responsibility. Especially their research institutions worked hard on identifying a view of society based on mutual responsibility, an international perspective about bringing progress to the poorest countries, and respect for human life vis-à-vis modern medical technology.

That all contributed to a solid and firm position for Christian Democrats at the center of the political system. The Dutch party has for a long time been a good example of this. Although the inner diversity reflected different coalition preferences, the leadership of the Dutch Christian Democrats was at that time able to follow a principled but cautious political course, in favor of external and internal socio-economic coherence.

27 Kriesi et al., l.c.

V The major questions of our times and the quest for principled leadership

The collapse of the Communist empire appeared to herald even greater opportunities for the realization of a political program of solidarity anchored in personalism. The European Union, a model of economic and political integration based on legal guarantees for freedom and social justice, was to a great extent the work of Christian Democratic politicians. The fall of Communism meant that this model could now be applied to new member states in Central and South-East Europe, but the transformation of the international political system had profound effects on domestic politics, more profound than anyone anticipated.

The Cold War had more or less trapped whole nations within the confines of the political entities that were imposed on them. Democracy, rule of law and access to an independent judiciary were privileges enjoyed by the citizens in a relatively small number of mainly Western European states. Freedom of movement, if it existed at all, existed only within a block or group of states, for instance the European Communities and the NAFTA; economic cooperation was organized on a regional or a political basis. After 1989 many obstacles to traveling and trade were lifted and the international community moved rapidly to embrace new or revived worldwide structures in communication, transport, economics, politics, and

law: examples include media satellites, the World Wide Web, Open Skies, the World Trade Organization, the Global Compact, the International Criminal Court, to name but a few. Trade and investment spread across the globe, and so did speculation in financial instruments. More than ever before, people were able to escape from a destiny that had been fixed for generations and they started to move from rural areas to the cities, either within their own country or to other countries and continents. International migration was sometimes an escape from violence and prosecution, sometimes from hunger and poverty, and sometimes the result of a well-prepared decision by parents prepared to make tremendous efforts in the interest of their children's future. Migration laws give the impression that these motives can be separated out, but the human reality tells a very different story.

Urbanization and growing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity created unprecedentedly rapid social change and apparent discontinuity. This had far-reaching effects in the countries which, until that time, had been far ahead in terms of stability[28]. These were often precisely those countries where broad support for Christian Democracy had been self-evident. Nevertheless the leadership of these parties continued to build on old loyalties, committing themselves to continuity and sometimes a romantic identification with the rural past of closed communities. Compassion and solidarity continued to be important values, but primarily with regard to relations close to home. The preference for sustaining small communities and the acceptance of large-scale, environmentally hazardous agricultural activities were both justified by the principle of subsidiarity and the "spreading" of responsibilities. However, subsidiarity is not a synonym for undue restraint; it cuts two ways: where public law is superfluous, the government should refrain from meddling in a community's affairs, but where public authorities are needed, they should not be conspicuous by their absence. Christian Democrats gradually lost their political anchor in the cities, which were the very centers of dynamism, creativity and tensions. The only temporary respite occurred when a figure who was recognizable as a man of his times (like the compassionate entrepreneur Ruud Lubbers) or a woman of her times (like the urban professional Angela Merkel) rose to the head of the party.

The situation was aggravated by changes in political culture. Some politicians yielded to neoliberal politics in the conviction that this was the best way to generate wealth[29], while media advisors bereft of ideology came to replace thinkers. To some extent, this decline was the result of a preference – especially among right-wing politicians – for forging new government coalitions with the neoliberals, who were on the rise throughout the Western world and who seduced the middle classes with ever greater material prosperity, often financed by loans to be paid off privately or as sovereign debt in the distant future. Similar coalitions of conservatives (sometimes wearing the disguise of "compassionate conservatism") and neoliberals helped the Republican Party in the United States to win elections or presented themselves as a brand new entity, such as Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*, and later *Popolo delle libertà* in Italy.

Worse still was the confusion that seemed to seize many politicians: they no longer knew what they stood for. Too many leading politicians rested on their laurels, satisfied with their achievements to date and caring little about the future: political marketing always has a short-term bias. It should come as no surprise then that they failed to understand the signs of the times. They succumbed to self-complacency when technical development and globalization appeared to be the easy way to generate wealth. Growing financial possibilities thanks to economic growth encouraged them to take on the role of political pleasers. With a few exceptions – for example, a strategy program for value-based renewal ("Nieuwe wegen, vaste waarden", 1995) and the program of economic renewal, developed by the Dutch Christian Democrat research institute around the turn of the century – the focus on underlying values was lost in political routine. For some time, a remarkable talent for leaving thorny issues undecided nevertheless helped the political structure of the Christian Democratic parties to survive. But when the Christian Democrats in the Netherlands went so far as to accept a political partner who radically opposed their very principles [30], the outcome almost dealt the party a fatal blow.

As a result, many sympathizers of the Christian-social tradition felt deserted, as did many truly value-oriented conservatives. Nevertheless the values themselves are still meaningful, and perhaps exactly what is needed to correct the mistakes of the past two decades. The personalistic view of humanity, the building of compassionate communities and international solidarity can be sufficient and convincing guides for the future.

28 For an early publication on the developments in Germany, see Wilhelm Heitmeyer (ed.), *Was treibt die Gesellschaft aueinander? Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Auf dem Weg von der Konsensus- zur Konfliktgesellschaft. Bd. I.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1997.

29 For an account of the apparent success of neoliberalism and its actual status, see Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2011.

30 See the 2010 election platform of the Dutch Freedom Party (*PVV*, *Partij voor de vrijheid*) and its influence on the coalition agreement of October 2010 between the Liberals (VVD) and Christian Democrats (CDA), which literally included programmatic conditions agreed with the PVV on migration, integration and other issues.

Under these circumstances, I would recommend a renewed clarification of the nature of the dialogue that should characterize Christian Democratic politics in view of the major questions of our times. Christian Democratic politicians have the task of bringing the values of mutual respect and compassion to life in the transnational and urban context of the 21st century. In the eyes of Christian Democrats, the *structure of society* has always been a subject of great importance. They encourage "the spreading of responsibility" in schools, hospitals, businesses and other institutions, and also in private life. Under the influence of neoliberalism, privatization – and thus commercialization – of public duties was sometimes mistaken for the spreading of responsibility. Accepting responsibility for the community remains an ethical obligation that suits Christian Democrats well, but not exclusively in the nostalgic form of an old-fashioned monocultural suburban family. In times of growing diversity, *social cohesion* in a wider sense should be an important political aspiration. Business corporations should also contribute to social cohesion through practices of corporate social responsibility. Doing justice to people – their needs and their interests – will bolster social cohesion[31].

A political party such as the Dutch Christian Democratic party includes members with different religious and philosophical convictions. Moreover, such political parties have the constitutional duty to extend their political dialogue to other political parties, in order to arrive at reasoned majority decisions. The guiding principles of personal dignity and solidarity under the conditions of profoundly pluralistic Western European democracies need a renewed clarification. The "method of discernment" of the Catholic social doctrine should not be viewed as an isolated activity for believers. On the contrary, the secular nature of the state and its commitment to human rights requires that the considerations must be valid in the wider context of a diverse society. The principle of equality, irrespective of faith, ethnicity or gender, is the consequence of equal human dignity.

Now more than ever, we need to do so much better than simply riding the populist swell. The starting point should be a profound exploration of what it means to be compassionate with respect to the urgent problems of the 21st century in the constitutional context of a democracy. The intrinsic relationship between the three "generations" of human rights needs to be explored in view of consistent policies. "Sustainability" as a political ideal should go beyond ecology, and enter the realms of economics and human security.

31 Stavros Zouridis & Ernst Hirsch Ballin, "A Legal and Justice Strategy towards Strengthening Social Cohesion". In: Sam Muller and Stavros Zouridis (eds.), *Law and Justice: A Strategy Perspective*. The Hague: Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher 2012, pp. 105-116.

Citizenship across borders, not only with respect to its political functions, should be the pedigree of personal freedom, including its gender dimensions. Globalization needs to be embedded in a transnational understanding of the rule of law: that is what Jos van Gennip has called "humanizing globalization"[32] and David Kinley "civilizing globalization"[33]. Solidarity beyond the state needs to redefine the role of public institutions (state, region, EU) according to the level of the problems (subsidiarity). The credibility of Christian Democratic invocations of "solidarity" will depend on the movement's ability to apply this principle with respect to intergenerational inequalities, gender inequalities and inequalities related to differences in national origin.

Meanwhile, the churches – often in inter-religious projects like the Earth Charter and the Sant'Egidio International Meetings – have embarked on such issues. They highlight responsibility in a much more profound sense than the way in which many politicians claim to take responsibility for one issue or another. True, farsighted responsibility crosses borders, cultures and generations.

32 J.J.A.M. van Gennip in several speeches, e.g. his presentation "De grote verhuizing. Vragen rond een komend beleid voor internationale samenwerking", The Hague 2002.

33 David Kinley, *Civilising Globalisation*: *Human Rights and the Global Economy*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2009.

VI Hope for the future amidst uncertainty

In this way, the ethical orientation of the religious communities can once more be a source of inspiration. The dialogue of the Christian Democrat will have to find its meaning in the productive common ground it shares with the social teaching of the churches: human dignity, solidarity with the downtrodden and human rights. The challenging question for Christian Democracy is essentially this: is Christian Democracy a service to ourselves or a service to others (the other)? Should it appeal to the self-centered sentiments of the electorate or to altruistic sentiments, i.e. the better me, love for our brethren and the downtrodden?

It is against this background that my final question needs to be answered: is there a *future for Christian Democratic politics*? I am unable to answer yes or no, but I can say something about circumstances and conditions. There must be a future for Christianity, since its yardstick is not temporal. A future for Christianity will always be synonymous with being ever prepared to be held responsible for your deeds and your omissions when confronted by the existence and the needs of the other. Be aware, be prepared: every moment is at the tipping point between good and evil.

Compassionate politics that embodies principles of human dignity and solidarity cannot be the extension of the ecclesiastical presence in society, since these principles are inherent to humanity. Nor can Christians be compelled to engage exclusively in Christian Democratic parties. Nonetheless, Christian Democratic parties used to be a fitting place for such politics, and that was a good thing. They appealed to the broad demographic of Catholic and Protestant citizens and offered them a framework for political expression of their ethical convictions. Such parties could be broad in their appeal, because their principles were sufficiently diverse and appealing.

The recent choice of the Dutch Christian Democratic leadership to adopt a more modest role for the time being, with fewer pretensions to power, is understandable: it would have been very presumptuous to take the moral high road without any self-investigation immediately after having been compromised by dubious political alliances and a resounding electoral defeat. But if Christian Democrats are not willing to be the salt of the earth or made salty again, what makes them valuable? Perhaps the leadership's 2012 efforts to re-establish the party's broad appeal came too soon. The groundwork still has to be laid. Only if the leadership is prepared to accept, first and foremost, that they have to restore their identity as Christian Democrats, is there a chance of regaining that appeal. Repositioning the party in the center by avoiding outspoken standpoints might help to stem further dramatic losses, but it will not be sufficient to bring about the renewal that is urgently needed. Christian Democrats will have to understand that their critical dialogue partner is not this season's fashion but faith for all seasons. The political marketing managers, who sometime pose as strategists although they have no idea about substantive strategies, may have become extremely influential in democratic politics, but even they cannot render such efforts superfluous.

Every human being needs a mirror: a mirror provides clear visible evidence of what someone looks like and what needs to be brushed up. Where is the Christian Democrats' mirror? Who or what will take the measure what they do and what they refuse to do? Will such a mirror reveal the desire to push the downtrodden aside, because they stand in the way of efforts to amass greater wealth, and a tendency to deal ruthlessly with someone else's shortcomings? For many years I have been one of those responsible for policies in the Dutch and European area of freedom, security and justice. Our policies, the product of our convictions about human rights and the rule of law, were intended to be humane but they were also strict and took a firm line. Of course, there were politicians who pushed for a more relentless, less humane approach, but for a Christian Democrat, resentment against migrants and youngsters addicted to drugs and violence cannot be the standard.

Christian Democrats are not the saints marching in, but there are serious questions that need to be asked about compassion: compassion for victims of injustice. An important strand of the 19th century anti-slavery movement was rooted in the Christian notion of the equality of each human being[34]. The fight against human trafficking should be a characteristically high priority for Christian Democrats in our times, both at a national level and at a European and international level.

Being a faithful politician is not about making life easy for yourself. But if you genuinely look for the other, you might find allies across political and denominational dividing lines. What will count in the end is not how many seats the Christian Democrats have in parliament or the government, but how many significant persons there are – regardless of party membership – who are the salt of the earth, salting politics with compassion.

A democracy cannot be a living reality on the basis of fair procedures and majority decision-making alone. A majority can easily discriminate against an outvoted minority; indeed there are many recent examples of human rights being "democratically" trodden underfoot. A living democracy based on the rule of law needs to be rooted in a conviction of mutual respect. But a democratic state cannot create convictions[35], let alone oblige people to share them. Christian Democracy is a possible source of such convictions, as are social democracy and liberalism. Every political movement will undermine itself if it gives up on its principles, even if the party concerned embodies all the procedures of internal democracy.

I will conclude with a simple statement of hope. What I am hoping for is that Christian Democratic values will be *one* of the legitimizing forces in this country and this part of the world, breathing life into the structures of our democracies, feeding them with the values of respect and compassion. Christian Democratic political parties should not assume that they have exclusive rights in this regard or that they are best placed to provide the answers. Their future will not depend on words spoken at conferences,

34 However, the Christian support for the antislavery movement mainly came from outside the establishment of most churches in the 19th century. See Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts.* München: C.H. Beck 2009, p.1193.

35 That is the significance of the so-called Böckenförde Dilemma: "Der freiheitliche, säkularisierte Staat lebt von Voraussetzungen, die er selbst nicht garantieren kann". See Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, *Recht, Staat, Freiheit. Studien zur Rechtsphilosophie, Staatstheorie und Verfassugsgeschichte* (Erweiterte Ausgabe). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1991, p. 112.

but on the answer that others read in what politicians do, or refuse to do. Each and every day, political parties and their leaders have a chance to make a difference, to help determine the face of the future[36].

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